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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON
HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6250

MICHAEL D. BOPP, STAFF DIRECTOR AND CHIEF COUNSEL
JOYCE A. RECHTSCHAFFEN, MINORITY STAFF DIRECTOR AND COUNSEL

October 21, 2005

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Chairman
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,
and Science
Senate Appropriations Committee
S 146 A
United States Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice
and Science
Senate Appropriations Committee
144 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Shelby and Mikulski:

We are writing to urge the Senate conferees on the Departments of Commerce and Justice, Science and Related Agencies Appropriations Act of 2006 (H.R. 2862), conference committee to accept the House-passed funding levels for the Bureau of the Census. Should the Senate-passed funding level be enacted, it will have dire consequences on the planned improvements for Census 2010, and will lead to the elimination of Census programs that improve government and businesses' ability to understand and provide services to communities.

The Senate-passed funding levels will lead to the elimination of tests and methodological improvements aimed at increasing the accuracy of Census 2010. It will also lead to the elimination of the Census Bureau's data series on the number of jobs by industry for individual metro areas, counties, and zip codes, as well as to a significant reduction in the Current Population Survey sample, which measures income, poverty, and health insurance coverage. These surveys provide critical information to governments about the needs of communities, and their elimination could lead to an unintended reduction of services.

Additionally, the Senate-passed funding level will force the Census to eliminate the American Community Survey (ACS), a new nationwide survey that provides communities an annual look at how they are changing. The ACS collects information from U.S. households similar to what was collected on the Census 2000 long form, such as income, commute time to work, home value, veteran status, and other important data. The ACS produces population and housing information every year instead of every ten years, which will reduce the cost of the official decennial census, and provides more up-

to-date information throughout the decade about trends in the U.S. population at the local community level. About three million households are surveyed each year.

In addition to its fiscal benefits, with its timely and updated information, the ACS allows all levels of government, as well as public and private developers to: 1) identify attractive business investment opportunities in urban and rural areas; 2) determine the nature and extent of social and economic concerns such as poverty, unemployment, educational attainment, and health insurance coverage; 3) promote urban job creation and economic development; and 4) access critical population information needed during disasters. A decrease in funding will impact Federal, State, and local government, in addition to the private sector's ability to gain a complete and up-to-date understanding of highly detailed demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of metropolitan areas, central cities, and rural communities.

Moreover, as the devastating effects of Hurricane Katrina have shown all too clearly, investing resources in documenting who lives where and understanding their economic situations is vitally important. Knowing more about American populations in all cities and towns will not only improve our economic development and urban planning, but will also optimize our capacity to deliver effective disaster response in times of tragedy. Specifically for the Gulf region ravaged by Hurricane Katrina, the ACS is going to be essential in making sound decisions during the rebuilding of New Orleans. Katrina highlighted the racial and economic disparity in this country. ACS will help us understand the plight and needs of these underserved communities, and its data will be critical for cities that took in Katrina evacuees to understand the demographics of the people who were relocated there. If Census does not have enough funding to continue the rollout of the ACS, the result will be a serious lack of data until 2012, when the decennial Census long form data from 2010 will be published. The American Community Survey can assist us in understanding who we must help, and how we need to help them, now.

We understand the reality of the fiscal climate in which we operate today. We are stretched beyond our resources and every penny counts. Nonetheless, we are convinced that the benefits of funding Census at the House levels will dramatically decrease the cost of the Census in the years to come, and will allow our country to identify and direct resources to areas in need. This is a small investment that can yield a mighty return, and the American people deserve it.

Sincerely,



Susan M. Collins
Chairman



Joseph I. Lieberman
Ranking Member